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Comprehensive review of special political missions

Overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/100, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit, at its seventy-second session, a timely report on overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, including efforts towards improving expertise and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender perspective and women's equal participation. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General, in that regard, to include relevant detailed information on those matters in the report.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 71/100, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly, at its seventy-second session, a timely report on the implementation of the resolution with regard to overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, including efforts towards improving expertise and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender perspective and women's equal participation. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request

2. Over the past year, special political missions have continued to play diverse and critical roles in the response of the United Nations to threats to international peace and security. In ongoing conflicts, such as those in Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, special political missions have played a vital role in striving to advance political transitions. In Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, among other countries, missions have worked to help governments and societies sustain peace and build resilient institutions, including through the provision of electoral support. Special political missions with regional mandates, including the three regional offices for Central Africa, Central Asia, and West Africa and the Sahel, have worked to identify risks early and enable coordinated, coherent and effective responses. All special political missions are working increasingly closely with regional and subregional organizations, both directly and through the strategic partnerships agendas implemented at United Nations headquarters. That includes efforts to collaborate analytically and operationally to address regionalized security threats, such as armed groups operating in the Lake Chad basin and the Sahel.

3. Since taking up office, I have made prevention a core theme that cuts across the work of all parts of the Organization. I have done so at a time when many of the goals articulated in the Charter of the United Nations and related documents are under threat, when progress is being experienced unequally around the world and when an increase in violent conflict and fragility threatens the lives of so many, leading to millions fleeing their homes. There is a need to reconceptualize and refocus our work towards not only preventing the outbreak of crises and their related grave costs, including in terms of human lives and suffering, but also the undermining of institutions and setbacks to societies' resilience and efforts to advance sustainable development. In reaching consensus on the Sustainable Development Goals, the membership of the United Nations has articulated a new collective agenda for investing in humanity's future, one that relies heavily on linking to our work in peace and security, development and human rights. I therefore see prevention as an organizing principle to drive reform, re-energize the United Nations and renew confidence in the value of the international multilateral system.

4. Special political missions have profoundly preventive dimensions, consistent with the Charter-based obligation to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". Efforts to improve the effectiveness, transparency, accountability and representativeness of special political operations must therefore include, at their core, a focus on mission capacities to strengthen prevention of the outbreak, escalation and continuation of violent conflict, as described in the landmark twin resolutions on sustaining peace of 2016, Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262. The resolutions, which are deeply interlinked with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, provide a comprehensive conceptual picture and organizing principle around which to focus efforts to strengthen the preventive roles of special political missions. It is in that context that I have called for a surge in preventive diplomacy as part of my vision for prevention, and for a drive to strengthen mediation capacities at all levels of the Organization. Those efforts should seek to enhance the capacities and resilience of States,

institutions and societies. Within the United Nations, we will continue to enhance the work we have accomplished with regard to our internal coordination and joint analysis for early warning and prevention during the past several years.

5. The present report, the fifth to the General Assembly on overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, covers developments during the period from 1 August 2016 to 31 July 2017. Section II focuses on key operational developments that occurred in special political missions. Section III provides detailed information on the interactive dialogue with Member States held on 26 May 2017, and its rich exchange on the role of special political missions in sustaining peace. Section IV addresses various policy issues pertaining to the missions, each of which includes details on how the Organization is striving to enhance transparency and accountability in all its work. Section V contains observations on the way forward.

II. Key developments

6. In 2016, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) provided good offices support and technical and logistical support in relation to a process that saw 12,594 selected delegates voting for members of the House of the People, while members of state assemblies elected the members of the Upper House. The members of both Houses elected Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo as President of Somalia on 8 February 2017. UNSOM played a key role in coordinating international community support for the political process and for its overall engagement in Somalia. As part of its electoral support mandate for elections by universal suffrage, as set out in Security Council resolutions 2275 (2016) and 2358 (2017), the Mission has been providing capacity-building, technical and strategic advice to both the National Independent Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation in preparation for the 2021 elections, the review of the provisional federal constitutions and the drafting of an electoral law. UNSOM has also been supporting the Government of Somalia in the security and rule of law sectors, in particular with the development of a comprehensive approach to security, and with the establishment of a new policing model for Somalia. As part of its human rights mandate, the Mission continued to perform monitoring and capacity-building efforts.

7. Following the commencement of the new political cycle, a strategic assessment was carried out by United Nations headquarters, UNSOM and the United Nations country team to ensure that the United Nations was well configured to support the next phase of State-building in Somalia. In a letter dated 5 May 2017 (S/2017/404), I presented the results of the strategic assessment to the Security Council. The results included recommendations to renew the mandate of UNSOM as a political mission based on its core functions of providing good offices and strategic advice on peacebuilding and State-building, coordinating international support and capacity-building for Somali institutions, and monitoring and reporting on violations, while adapting to better engage in the areas of focus identified in the assessment. Those included, in particular, adapting the entire range of the UNSOM mandate in the regions in support of the federalism project, and keeping a flexible approach to the United Nations footprint, underpinned by strong joint operational planning. On 14 June 2017, the Council extended the mandate of UNSOM, on the basis of those recommendations, in its resolution 2358 (2017).

8. During the reporting period, the Office of my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to lead, monitor and report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. During the reporting period, the Office contributed to regional efforts to advance the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration of Commitments of

12 December 2013 at the conclusion of the Kampala Dialogue; resolve the situation of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition fighters currently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; address the threat posed by the Allied Democratic Forces and other armed groups; and implement durable solutions for former combatants stationed in camps in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, together with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Office of my Special Envoy provided good offices to assist with implementation of the political agreement of 31 December, intended to pave the way for credible and peaceful elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

9. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2248 (2015), a United Nations office in Burundi was established in Bujumbura in January 2016 to support the efforts of my Special Envoy to lead and coordinate the political efforts of the United Nations in Burundi to work with its Government and other concerned stakeholders in support of an inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue, as well as in support of national efforts to build and sustain peace. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Envoy carried out tasks mandated in Council resolutions 2279 (2016) and 2303 (2016), which included supporting the inter-Burundian dialogue held under the auspices of the East African Community, coordinating with the East African Community's mediator and facilitator and providing technical and substantive support to the dialogue.

10. During the reporting period, South Sudan and Uganda withdrew their troops from the African Union Regional Task Force fighting the Lord's Resistance Army, and the United States of America ended the mandate of its Special Forces supporting the Regional Task Force. In the light of the renewal by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union of the Regional Task Force's mandate until 22 May 2018, taking into account the need to realign the concept of operations of the Regional Task Force with the latest developments on the ground, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) will work with regional partners, including the African Union, to review and revise the United Nations regional strategy to combat the threat of the Lord's Resistance Army.

11. In its resolution 2349 (2017), the Security Council called upon UNOCA, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the United Nations Office to the African Union to redouble their support to governments in the region, and to subregional and regional organizations, to address the impact of violence carried out by Boko Haram and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on peace and stability in the Lake Chad basin region, including by addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism; conducting gender-sensitive research on the drivers of radicalization for women; and analysing the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations. The Council also requested that I prepare a report on the Lake Chad basin region by 30 August 2017. UNOWAS also continues to advance the objectives of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, including through its liaison cell in Nouakchott, which focuses on supporting the work of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

12. In December 2016, a strategic review of the key priorities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) was conducted, key conclusions of which were endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2343 (2017). The strategic review emphasized the need for UNIOGBIS to refocus its existing efforts towards political capacities in support of the good offices and political facilitation role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and recommended the streamlining of its management structure. UNIOGBIS is in the process of implementing the recommendations of the strategic review mission.

13. A strategic assessment of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) was conducted in May and June 2017 to help adjust the concept of operations and structure of the Mission to the changing realities on the ground. Those efforts will include a phased ramping up of the rotational presence of international staff in Libya while maintaining an office in Tunis. Through an integrated electoral assistance programme, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, UNSMIL provided advice and support to the High National Elections Commission, including technical advice for the electoral elements of the constitutional drafting process and assistance with the coordination of international electoral assistance. In resolution 2362 (2017), the Council expanded the applicability of the measures in relation to attempts to illicitly export crude oil from Libya to include refined petroleum products.

14. In Colombia, the consolidation of the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities that followed the signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) on 24 November 2016, and the historic completion of the laying down of weapons, represented major milestones in peace implementation. The strong commitment of the parties kept the peace process on track despite numerous challenges.

15. The United Nations Mission in Colombia, authorized by the Security Council in its resolution 2261 (2016), initiated its one-year mandate on 26 September 2016 and has since verified the ceasefire, which has held remarkably well since its signing. The Mission has also monitored the movement of more than 7,000 FARC-EP members to the 26 assembly zones and points. Under United Nations verification, on 27 June 2017, FARC-EP completed the laying down of individual weapons, and it is expected that the destruction of a large number of arms caches will be completed by September, as FARC-EP begins its transition to a legal political movement. On 10 July, following a request by the parties, the Council adopted resolution 2366 (2017) establishing a follow-on mission to verify the reintegration of FARC-EP members and the implementation of security guarantees for the group and for conflict-affected communities. Its activities will begin in full on 26 September 2017 following the completion of the current mission mandate. By supporting the crucial reintegration phase, the second mission can play an important role in helping consolidate peace in Colombia.

16. The reporting period witnessed a high level of activity and unprecedented progress, but also stagnations and serious challenges in talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders, which were facilitated by the United Nations. In January 2017, in parallel to the bicommunal negotiations and marking a historic phase in the Cyprus talks, I opened the Conference on Cyprus. The Conference aimed to discuss the sixth and last chapter of the negotiations on security and guarantees, with the participation of the guarantor Powers (Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and in the presence of the European Union as an observer (the European Union has played an enhanced role in the peace process, under United Nations auspices, to help prepare for the implementation of the European Union acquis in a future Turkish-Cypriot constituent State). The Conference reconvened on 28 June 2017 in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, with parallel negotiations on security and guarantees and all other outstanding issues interdependently, beginning with territory, property and governance and power-sharing. However, in early July, after intense negotiations, and in consultation with the participants, I closed the Conference without an agreement having been reached, reiterating that the United Nations, as facilitator of the process, remained at the disposal of the parties.

17. During the reporting period, the Special Envoy for Syria held four rounds of intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva on the basis of Security Council resolution 2254

(2015) and the Geneva communiqué of June 2012. The talks were guided by the substantive agenda regarding political transition issues, which was approved by the Council in March 2017. The Office of the Special Envoy established a technical consultative process so that experts of the negotiating delegations could identify commonalities on the agenda and better prepare for formal negotiations. The Office continues to host the International Syria Support Group task forces on ceasefire and humanitarian access and facilitate the participation of Syrian women and civil society in the talks through the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and the Civil Society Support Room. The Office has also provided expertise to ceasefire talks in Astana, which were not held under the United Nations umbrella.

18. In Iraq, the completion of the military campaign in Mosul sharpened the expectations and role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). UNAMI must now focus on a number of pressing issues, in consultation with the Government of Iraq, including: promoting bilateral dialogue between key actors from Baghdad and Erbil on the planned Kurdistan referendum on 25 September 2017; facilitating efforts to reach a process of national and societal reconciliation; assisting the development of processes for holding elections; supporting accountability and justice for human rights violations and war crimes; and advising on security sector reform as well as assisting the voluntary, dignified and safe return of 3 million internally displaced persons to liberated areas.

19. In its resolution 2331 (2016), the Security Council condemned acts of trafficking, particularly the sale or trade in persons undertaken by ISIL, and expressed its intention to consider targeted sanctions for those involved in such activities. It also expressed its intention to consider targeted sanctions for individuals and entities involved in trafficking in persons in areas affected by armed conflict and for those involved in sexual violence in conflict. In its resolution 2347 (2017), the Council condemned the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, notably by terrorist groups, and encouraged States to propose listings of those involved to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individual, groups, undertakings and entities. Council resolution 2368 (2017) added eight names to that list.

20. On 15 June 2017, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on Yemen (S/PRST/2017/7) calling on all parties to engage constructively with the latest proposals of the Special Envoy for Yemen with regard to: (a) increasing commercial and humanitarian shipments through Red Sea ports, including new arrangements for the management of Hudaydah port and city; and (b) resuming government salary payments and preserving essential government services in all areas of the country. The Special Envoy has continued to engage with the parties in line with the presidential statement and with a view to reviving political negotiations.

21. A strategic review of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reaffirmed the need for continued good offices by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and UNIFIL in order to preserve the cessation of hostilities and make progress towards a permanent ceasefire, including by exploring confidence-building measures. The Office supported the Government of Lebanon in launching nationwide consultations in September 2016 to develop a national plan of action for the prevention of violent extremism.

22. The conflict in Afghanistan continued unabated during the reporting period. In 2016, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented a total of 11,418 civilian casualties, the highest since 2009. Some 650,000 individuals were newly internally displaced by the conflict, and 620,000 Afghans returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. The Government of Afghanistan secured pledges of military and civilian financial assistance from international partners

through 2020 and signed a peace agreement with an opposition armed group, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin. However, there was no progress towards a peace process with the Taliban. Among its core activities, UNAMA supported the preparation of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan; provided assistance to the electoral management bodies; supported regional initiatives to enhance economic, political and security cooperation; reported on human rights; and advocated for the implementation of the Afghan national plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The Government had formally requested continued United Nations electoral assistance to support Wolesi Jirga and District Council elections, and an amendment to the electoral law was gazetted in September 2016. UNAMA also provided support for the revision of the penal code, which was passed by legislative decree in May 2017 and which incorporates all the country's substantive treaty obligations.

23. The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia is striving to maximize the impact of a variety of new entry points for encouraging regional cooperation that have emerged in the past year. The security situation in the region remains fragile.

24. In relation to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Security Council expanded existing sanctions measures in its resolutions 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016), and introduced new measures on coal, minerals and aviation fuel. In its resolution 2356 (2017), the Council designated for sanction 14 additional individuals and 4 entities.

III. Interactive dialogue with Member States

25. In its resolution 71/100, the General Assembly requested me to hold regular, inclusive and interactive dialogue on overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions. The resolution also encouraged the Secretariat to reach out to Member States prior to the holding of such dialogue to ensure wide and meaningful participation. Following close consultations with the Bureau of the Fourth Committee, the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat organized an interactive dialogue to discuss the role of United Nations special political missions in sustaining peace. The dialogue was held on 26 May 2017.

26. In his opening remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs noted that the interactive dialogue provided an opportunity to take stock of progress on clarifying, focusing and improving the contribution of special political missions to sustaining peace. The dialogue came one year after the adoption by the General Assembly and Security Council of landmark identical resolutions on sustaining peace, which introduced a new, more holistic, Charter-driven understanding of how the United Nations must orient all its efforts towards preventing conflict. In the light of the diverse mandates, configurations and areas of deployment of special political missions, the Under-Secretary-General suggested that the interactive dialogue was a unique moment to consider what steps had been and should be taken to collectively strengthen the impact of those tools as part of the forward-looking agenda for sustaining peace. The Under-Secretary-General offered a number of reflections on areas in which special political missions, and the Headquarters offices and administrative systems and procedures that support them, might need to adapt to best achieve that goal.

27. In the ensuing discussion, a number of Member States took the floor to address key themes of relevance for special political missions. The majority of speakers emphasized the importance of the sustaining peace agenda and called on the Secretariat, Member States and other partners to focus their efforts on aligning activities across all

pillars of the Organization with both the process and the objective of sustaining peace. Many also referred to my ongoing reform initiatives as well as my vision for prevention, and expressed the hope that they would enhance capacity and coherence across the United Nations in support of its efforts to sustain peace.

28. Many Member States highlighted the importance of special political missions in preventing conflict, and noted that the missions would be in large part responsible for implementing my call for a surge in preventive diplomacy. At the strategic level, a number of Member States asked that the concepts of conflict prevention and sustaining peace be further clarified, including in relation to women and youth, peace and security. At the operational level, several Member States underlined the importance of overcoming challenges to ensuring a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace across countries, sectors and pillars of the Organization. In that regard, a number of Member States highlighted the important role played by the regional offices for Central Asia, Central Africa, and West Africa and the Sahel, including with regard to promoting coherent strategies to sustain peace. Several Member States welcomed the work of regional special political missions in cooperating with regional and subregional organizations in support of conflict prevention and resolution, noting the importance of ensuring that their relationships remained dynamic and raising the subject of regular review. Several Member States highlighted the important role of early warning in conflict prevention and inquired about the steps the Secretariat had taken to strengthen its early warning mechanisms.

29. Two Member States spoke of their experiences in hosting special political missions and provided reflections on working with the Secretariat on the planning for and deployment of the missions. They emphasized that the principle of national ownership must be central to the efforts of a special political mission and that a one-size-fits-all approach to mandate and mission design should be avoided. One of the Member States highlighted the importance of regional support for the success of a mission, as well as the value in ensuring gender balance among the personnel within missions. Another suggested that the sustaining peace agenda provided an important conceptual basis for promoting inclusive dialogue and for envisioning sustainable and peaceful futures for countries in transition.

30. Finally, many Member States expressed concern that special political missions continued to struggle for sufficient and sustainable funding. Given the increasing importance afforded to prevention by Member States and the Secretariat alike, several expressed the hope that ongoing efforts to achieve savings in other areas of the Organization's work could lead to modest increases in support to special political missions. Some Member States also highlighted the need for the General Assembly to address the issue of funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions.

IV. Key policy issues pertaining to special political missions

Enhancing expertise and effectiveness in preventing conflict and sustaining peace

31. As noted earlier, special political missions are among the most important set of preventive tools available to the Organization. Regional political offices are widely recognized as effective forward platforms for preventive diplomacy, while my Special Envoys, Representatives and Advisers help national and international actors resolve a wide variety of issues, from territorial questions to regional conflicts, constitutional and electoral crises, reunification negotiations and peace talks. Field-based operational missions sustain preventive efforts across a range of disciplines, such as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration, security sector reform and human rights, to help prevent and resolve conflict, support complex political transitions and

sustain peace in coordination with national actors and United Nations development, humanitarian and human rights entities. They are therefore a critical example of prevention that bridges the work of the three pillars of the Organization. Regular public reporting on human rights by special political missions has served as a key early warning tool and generated momentum for early preventive action. All of those tools pursue the immediate objective of mitigating the triggers and effects of violent conflict while also seeking to consolidate peace and move towards the longer-term goals of prevention and sustainable peace.

32. Our efforts to strengthen the work of special political missions in preventing conflict and sustaining peace build on important ongoing reform efforts within the Organization's peace and security architecture. The report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (A/70/95-S/2015/446) and the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of its recommendations (A/70/357-S/2015/682) featured a number of important areas of work to increase the effectiveness of peace operations, including special political missions, in preventing conflict and sustaining peace. In line with the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel, I continue to explore with regional and national partners the establishment of regional offices in the regions of North Africa, West Asia and Southern Africa.

33. On 19 February 2016, a report of the Secretary-General was submitted to the General Assembly (A/70/745) that contained a detailed proposal on ways to continue to strengthen the Organization's work in the area of conflict prevention and mediation, including ways to improve political analysis, build closer partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, strengthen early warning capacity and planning tools to translate early warning information into early action and increase technical expertise on conflict prevention and mediation, in particular with regard to women, peace and security, and local and national mediation.

34. As we continue to seek opportunities to render the United Nations more responsive, efficient and effective in preventing conflict and sustaining peace, the agendas for the reform and strengthening of peace operations, including special political missions, will remain central to the Organization's efforts to transform its vision for prevention into a reality.

Regional partnerships

35. Collaboration and communication with regional and subregional organizations is critical to the success of the United Nations in preventing conflict and sustaining peace. The preventive role of special political missions should always support, not serve as a substitute for, regional and local efforts to achieve peace. Working in tandem with regional and subregional organizations can improve the collective knowledge, analysis, reach and influence in our conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, regional actors are often better positioned to detect potential crises early and to mobilize coordinated international responses. Partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations must therefore be based on the principles of transparency, mutual accountability and comparative advantage, including in terms of identifying lead and supporting operational roles, burden-sharing and the sequencing of activities and deployments.

36. During the past year, significant progress has been made in strengthening the partnership between the United Nations and African Union in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The United Nations Office to the African Union continued to serve a catalytic role in the partnership while servicing the Departments of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support of the Secretariat. The Security Council adopted decisions, most notably resolution 2320

(2016), to enable timely responses to disputes and emerging crises in partnership with the African Union, while its Peace and Security Council, in its communiqués of 29 September 2016 and 30 May 2017, commended the significant progress over the past five years and reiterated the need to render that cooperation increasingly predictable, systematic and strategic. In January 2017, I delivered my first address to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, taking the opportunity to renew the commitment of the United Nations to enhance this important partnership on the basis of solidarity and respect.

37. On 19 April 2017, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and I convened the first United Nations-African Union Annual Conference to discuss the most pressing peace and security issues in Africa, and to help enhance political coherence and facilitate, as much as possible, convergence in decision-making. At the occasion, the Chairperson and I signed the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, which provides a comprehensive strategic vision for a stronger partnership to address the peace and security challenges across the continent.

38. African Union member States have also started implementing the decision relating to the Peace Fund endorsed by the twenty-seventh Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Kigali in July 2016, with regard to greater self-reliance and burden-sharing for African Union peace efforts, especially the funding of 25 per cent of the costs of its peace support operations by 2020. That decision is critical to enhancing the capacity of the African Union to effectively partner with the United Nations in addressing peace and security challenges in Africa. I therefore welcome the decision, and encourage the Security Council to actively support the process by agreeing on sustained, predictable and flexible mechanisms to support African Union peace operations.

39. The partnership between the United Nations and the European Union on peace and security is characterized by strategic and operational cooperation, underpinned by a policy framework that has been in place since 2003 and facilitated by the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels. The foreign and security policy of the European Union, as outlined in its global strategy adopted in June 2016, identifies the United Nations as a core partner and seeks close coordination, particularly in countries where Common Security and Defence Policy missions operate alongside United Nations peace operations, such as in the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Somalia. The European Union Political and Security Committee held its annual informal meeting with the Security Council in June 2017, where conflict prevention emerged as a top priority for both organizations, particularly with regard to mediation, security sector reform and the prevention of violent extremism. The discussion built on the third iteration of the United Nations-European Union dialogue on conflict prevention, which was held in March 2017.

40. The United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Vienna, established in October 2016 with extrabudgetary funds and representing the Department of Political Affairs, has led to a marked improvement of coordination between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), fostering closer links with key parts of the OSCE secretariat and the Chairperson-in-Office. The Liaison Office also services the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, enabling the effective channelling of support and best practices of the three departments to the OSCE secretariat on a broad range of issues, and vice versa. Operationally, the United Nations continues to cooperate closely with OSCE in its role, together with the European Union, as co-chair of the Geneva international discussions, a unique framework that brings together the United Nations, the European Union and OSCE in a conflict prevention and resolution mechanism. Since

2011, the role of the United Nations in this configuration has been fulfilled by the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions.

41. With many special political missions operating across the Middle East and North Africa, cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States remains critical. The United Nations has continued working with the League towards the opening of a United Nations liaison office in Cairo, following the 24 September 2016 signing by the Secretaries-General of both organizations of the protocol of amendment of the text of the cooperation agreement between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. The United Nations continues to pursue dialogue with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and, in May 2017, the Department of Political Affairs and OIC held a senior-level brainstorming session on the political and security situation in the Middle East in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with the participation of regional special political missions and peacekeeping operations, as well as representatives from United Nations headquarters. Another brainstorming session on Africa is planned for the end of 2017. The three entities have also collaborated on a number of electoral initiatives, including the training of electoral staff, the managing of electoral databases and the holding of institutional memory and knowledge-sharing events for electoral practitioners.

42. In addition to those partnerships, the United Nations will continue to work evermore closely with other regional and subregional organizations, including through liaison presences, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the South African Development Community.

Women, peace and security

43. Special political missions play an increasingly important role in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. In their areas of deployment, missions spearhead many of the United Nations-led efforts to promote women's participation in peace processes and to mainstream gender into the Organization's political and conflict prevention work. A total of 25 gender advisers are now active in 11 Department of Political Affairs-led field missions, a dramatic increase from 2015, when only six missions had full-time gender expertise. Recent deployments included gender advisers to the Offices of the Special Envoys for Syria and the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations Mission in Colombia, while UNAMI deployed a Women's Protection Adviser to work on conflict-related sexual violence.

44. The deployment of dedicated gender expertise has had a catalytic impact on the capacity of special political missions to effectively mainstream gender into their work, as well as on the capacity of United Nations headquarters. Since 2014, all reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the work of special political missions have contained text on gender/women, peace and security and data disaggregated by sex, and more than half have also included recommendations specific to women, peace and security. To enable greater oversight, transparency and accountability on peace operations and women, peace and security issues, in 2016 the Council established an Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which, during the reporting period, met with the senior leadership of special political missions to discuss the situation of women in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Lake Chad basin and Yemen.

45. In February 2017, the Department of Political Affairs, in close coordination with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), convened the first joint workshop for gender advisers in Entebbe, Uganda. The workshop brought together 39 gender advisers and focal points from field missions and UN-Women country offices. The workshop helped strengthen

cooperation on women, peace and security matters between the entities and allowed participants to exchange ideas, good practices and lessons learned for effective implementation of the women, peace and security mandate.

46. Special political missions have continued to foster an increase in the number of women participating in peacemaking efforts, as well as transparency on the gender makeup and dynamics of such efforts. UNSMIL, for example, has begun systematically collecting and updating data on women's participation in the political dialogue and the Government of National Accord. The efforts included a study on women's leadership that provided baseline data on women in decision-making positions within the current governance structures in Libya.

47. The United Nations Mission in Colombia has facilitated dialogue spaces for women's organizations and members of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, which includes members of the Government, FARC-EP and United Nations observers. Women's involvement in the work of the Mechanism has contributed to building confidence in the peace process among both the members of the Mechanism and of local communities.

48. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to the Special Envoy for Syria has continued to work to ensure that gender perspectives are considered throughout the political process. Since 2017, the Office of the Special Envoy has been systematically tracking the number of women in the delegations participating in the intra-Syrian talks, their substantive roles, gender dynamics and how they advance the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

49. During the reporting period, UNIOGBIS provided support to the training and establishment of four regional women's mediation networks, which will be integrated into local peace structures that have been traditionally composed of mostly male, religious and elder chiefs of the communities. The UNIOGBIS training programme aims to build the capacities of 145 women in total.

Electoral assistance

50. Special political missions continue to respond to the evolving nature of electoral mandates. In particular, during the reporting period, the Department of Political Affairs, as the General Assembly-mandated focal point for electoral assistance, increasingly received requests for targeted, medium- and long-term expert assistance aimed at supporting and strengthening the existing capacities of national electoral institutions. In addition, the Department received requests for advice on creating an environment conducive to credible elections. United Nations technical assistance and capacity-building activities were often provided in parallel with preventive diplomacy and other conflict prevention activities of the United Nations to encourage consensus with regard to establishing the legal electoral framework, focusing on inclusion and non-discrimination and encouraging broad participation. Special political missions that have electoral mandates continue to ensure that all United Nations electoral assistance policies and activities are gender-sensitive and include key components that promote women's political participation. For example, in Afghanistan, the Department of Political Affairs advised the Special Commission on Electoral Reform on changes to the electoral system, including ways to increase women's participation through the use of quotas and other temporary special measures.

51. In countries that host special political missions, electoral assistance is delivered in a fully integrated manner, under the mission lead, irrespective of whether the mission is structurally integrated. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes contribute significantly to the implementation of electoral assistance mandates.

Safety and security

52. During the reporting period, a significant number of field-based special political missions operated in environments that were highly volatile and were in many areas marred by serious security challenges, including active and ongoing military conflicts. While field-based special political missions continued to feature prominently among the mechanisms employed by the United Nations to support the facilitation of peace agreements and their implementation, those circumstances factored significantly into their overall field posture, requiring continuous attention and, on many occasions, significant investments to minimize the risk exposure of United Nations personnel, operations and assets.

53. Most of United Nations personnel employed by the special political missions are based or operate in areas of high-intensity conflict, including situations in which United Nations personnel are directly targeted or armed groups operate. Those environments include Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Also, non-field-based personnel, such as experts supporting the work of the Security Council, are often deployed to volatile environments. The incidents resulting in the loss of life of United Nations experts in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the attacks against United Nations convoys in Libya and Yemen, are stark examples. The Organization has been working to address those incidents, including through working with relevant government authorities on fact-finding investigations into the incidents.

54. Those contexts present an increasing and direct challenge to the Organization's ability to "stay and deliver". The Department of Political Affairs and the special political missions periodically engage with the Department of Safety and Security to review risk management strategies in order to adapt and minimize their impact on mandate delivery. Special political missions rely primarily on host governments for protection, which at times have had a less than adequate capacity to deliver security services. In order to address those issues, over the past several years the Organization has implemented a number of mitigation measures for ensuring the security of special political mission personnel and assets in the field in order to enable missions to stay and deliver. Examples include the deployment of United Nations civilian security personnel, increased cooperation with regional partners that have military personnel on the ground, the deployment of guard units provided by Member States and the employment of private security companies where appropriate and in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions.

55. In volatile environments, a heightened risk of attack against United Nations personnel may lead to a reduction in mission movements, coupled with a heavy static security posture. Heightened security measures, while necessary, may limit options for outreach, thereby reducing direct engagement with local communities. In order to strike the right balance, members of senior management of the special political missions are implementing, where applicable and in coordination with the respective country teams, the programme criticality framework developed by the High-level Working Group on Programme Criticality to allow for informed decision-making with regard to acceptable risk for United Nations personnel.

56. Moreover, the presence of special political missions in highly volatile settings has a significant budgetary impact on the special political missions. Security-related costs and associated mitigation measures constitute one of the main components of their budgets.

57. The United Nations Secretariat Safety and Security Integration Project, led by the Department of Safety and Security, continues to progress with the support of the Departments of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (see

General Assembly resolution 70/104 and A/70/383), among others. The project aims to bring the Secretariat's security workforce under the primary management authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security in order to achieve greater effectiveness in the delivery of safety and security services to enable the Organization's activities. The approach is expected to be beneficial for special political missions in terms of quality of service and effective use of resources, both of which are crucial to enabling operations in the continuously evolving security environment.

Geographical distribution and gender representation

58. Improving the representation of women throughout the Organization, including in field-based special political missions, is one of my highest priorities. As of May 2017, 32.1 per cent of internationally recruited staff serving in the missions were women, an increase of 3 per cent over the previous year. Among locally recruited staff in those missions, 15.3 per cent were women, a modest improvement of 2 per cent over the previous year. While that represents a continuation of the generally positive trend in women's representation among international personnel serving with field-based special political missions, the rate of improvement is inadequate.

59. The ongoing reform efforts within the organization will include a road map with benchmarks and time frames aimed at reaching full gender parity at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels by the end of my tenure, and reaching full gender parity in the Organization at all levels by 2026, with an understanding that there will be some outliers who, owing to their starting points, may only reach parity by 2028. I intend to submit a report on the issue to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.

60. Similarly, geographic diversity in the Organization is a fundamental requirement for its success. As of May 2017, the distribution of the 1,352 internationally recruited staff serving in the missions administered by the Department of Field Support were as follows: 23.7 per cent from the African Group, 22.6 per cent from the Asia-Pacific Group, 11.9 per cent from the Eastern European Group, 7.2 per cent from the Latin American and Caribbean Group and 34.5 per cent from the Group of Western European and other States. Of the 2,022 locally recruited staff, 12.9 per cent were from the African Group, 82.1 per cent from the Asia-Pacific Group, 0.001 per cent from the Eastern European Group, 3.2 per cent from the Latin American and Caribbean Group and 1.7 per cent from the Group of Western European and other States.

V. Observations

61. In the present report, I have emphasized the centrality of the special political missions in achieving my vision for the future of the Organization and, more broadly and importantly, vis-à-vis the expectations set out in the Charter and the mandates provided by the different governing bodies of the United Nations. To do so, the Secretariat and Member States must continue to strive to rethink, adapt and modernize the ways in which we design, employ and support such tools in a changing global landscape.

62. In the face of an increasingly interdependent world, we must ensure that threats are understood at a regional level and that the efforts of special political missions, whether in lead or supporting roles, are part of a comprehensive approach to sustaining our engagement in international peace and security. The significant progress made in recent years to strengthen cooperation with regional and subregional organizations must be sustained and built upon to maximize comparative advantages,

tap into deep understandings of regional political dimensions and local networks and build joint analysis and early warning capacity. After having signed the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, I look forward to working closely with the African Union and Member States to help advance conflict prevention and resolution on the continent of Africa.

63. On the ground, missions must ensure that their efforts reflect a deep understanding of, engagement with and buy-in of the people they are mandated to help, as highlighted by the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (A/70/95-S/2015/446) and the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture (A/69/968-S/2015/490). As more than 90 per cent of special political mission personnel continue to work in non-permissive security environments, we must adapt, invest and explore innovative approaches to working effectively in challenging security contexts. Finally, achieving the full potential of special political missions as tools of international peace and security will require adequate, transparent and responsive financing, backstopping and administrative support arrangements.

64. Turning those aspirations into reality will require sustained commitment to reform and renewal in the Organization. In that regard, the reform streams I have initiated, including the reviews of the United Nations peace and security architecture and management and field support arrangements, seek to achieve greater transparency, accountability and effectiveness in our operations, including special political missions. I look forward to working closely with Member States, including through the General Assembly and its Fourth Committee, to move that agenda ahead so that we can ensure special political missions remain an effective, efficient tool for the prevention of conflict and for sustaining peace in years to come.

Annex

United Nations special political missions (as at 1 August 2017)

Special Envoys

1. Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus
2. Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
3. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara
4. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)
5. United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions
6. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria
7. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan
8. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region
9. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
10. Special Envoy to the Secretary-General to lead and coordinate the political efforts of the United Nations in Burundi

Sanctions panels and monitoring groups

11. Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea
12. Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo
13. Panel of Experts on the Sudan
14. Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
15. Panel of Experts on Libya
16. Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic
17. Panel of Experts on Yemen
18. Panel of Experts on South Sudan
19. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities
20. Implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)
21. Support for the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004)
22. Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate

Field-based missions

23. Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
24. Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
25. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
26. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

27. United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
28. United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau
29. United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa
30. United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
31. United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia
32. United Nations Office to the African Union
33. United Nations support team to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission
34. United Nations Support Mission in Libya
35. United Nations Mission in Colombia